

Opening Statement

Joint Committee on Education & Skills

Progress made on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the interim report on the use of reduced timetables in schools and effects of Covid 19.

15th October 2020

Chair

Thank you for the invitation to attend today to update the Committee in relation to the progress made on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the interim report on the use of reduced timetables in schools in the context of covid-19 arrangements.

My name is Mary Cregg, Principal Officer in the Department's Social Inclusion Unit. I am accompanied by my colleague, Eddie Ward, Principal Officer in the Special Education Section of the Department.

As the Committee will be aware the Department has drafted guidelines for schools and engaged with education stakeholders on their content and format. The guidelines draw on the Interim Report, submissions received by the Joint Committee and feedback from the education stakeholders. The intention was that the guidelines would issue to schools earlier this year. However, this plan was impacted by the closure of school buildings in March as part of the Government response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

During the period from March to the end of the 2019/20 school year, the Department's priorities included the following:

- the continuity of learning for all students on a remote basis
- development of guidance and supports for schools and teachers in responding to this unprecedented circumstance
- development and delivery of an extended summer programme for children with the most complex needs to replace the traditional July Provision
- planning for the safe and sustainable reopening of schools for all children for the 2020/21 school year

Having regard to the priorities of recent months and the impact of Covid-19 on schools, it was decided that new policy announcements would be kept to a minimum. For example, some curricular changes at primary and post primary were deferred. Similarly the Department did not introduce the guidelines on use of reduced timetables at the beginning of the new school year.

The Department is in the process of consulting with education stakeholders to consider the timing of the introduction of the guidelines in the context of Covid 19 and the current operating environment for schools. Once this process has completed, it is intended that the guidelines will issue to schools allowing time for schools to plan for their implementation.

A copy of the guidelines has been provided to the Committee. The guidelines provide for TUSLA Education Support Service to be notified if a reduced timetable is implemented and for such instances to be recorded. The aim is to ensure that the use of reduced timetables is limited solely to those circumstances where it is absolutely necessary. The guidelines also

provide for consultation with parents/guardians and requires their consent for the use of a reduced timetable.

With regard to the other recommendations in the Interim Report, I wish to make the following observations:

The provision of education for children with special needs is an ongoing priority for Government. In addition over €125m is spent on the DEIS Programme.

The numbers of special classes, special education teachers, Special Needs Assistants and psychologists are at unprecedented levels.

The Department of Education and Skills currently spends approximately **€2 Billion or 20% of its total educational budget annually** on making additional provision for children with special educational needs.

In this regard, Budget 2021 provides for the following additionality:

- Some 990 additional special needs assistants will be recruited to work with children with special educational needs in schools. There will bring the total number to 18,000 SNAs in our schools.
- 235 new teachers will be recruited to work in special classes in our schools while another 23 teachers will be hired for special schools.
- An additional 145 special education teachers will be recruited.
- As a result, an additional 1,200 new places in special classes will come on stream in next year.
- The roll-out of the School Inclusion Model (SIM) will continue with a further pilots being established in two extra Community Healthcare Organisation as part of the expansion of the new model.
- As part of this expansion of the SIM, some 80 new therapists (Speech and Language Therapists, Behavioural and Occupational Therapists) and 30 educational psychologists will be recruited to support the expansion of the new model.

In addition to this, training and professional development and building school capacity in relation special needs continues to be a priority.

The guidelines set out the process which applies where reduced timetables are used by schools. Parents must be consulted in the decision making. The data collected from schools will clarify the extent to which reduced timetables are used by schools. When this data is analysed, the Department will have to consider if other policy initiatives are required so that every child is facilitated to receive a full education which is their entitlement.

Thank you for your time and we are happy to take questions from the Committee on this subject.



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

The Use of Reduced Timetables in Schools

Guidelines for schools in relation to recording and notification of the use of reduced timetables in schools.

Prepared by the Department of Education and Skills,
Department of Children and Youth Affairs and Tusla
Education Support Service

To: The Managerial Authorities of Recognised Primary, Secondary
Community and Comprehensive Schools
and the Chief Executives of Education and Training Boards.

1 Introduction

The purpose of these Guidelines is to provide clarity to school authorities and parents/guardians around the use of reduced timetables in schools, to ensure that the use of reduced timetables are limited to only those circumstances where it is absolutely necessary and, that where such usage occurs, schools follow best practice with the interests of the student to the fore. The guidelines also set out the process for schools to report the use of reduced timetables to Tusla Education Support Service (TESS).

These guidelines will be subject to review by the Department of Education and Skills and Tusla Education Support Service.

It is acknowledged that many schools already approach the issue in the best interests of the student. However, the guidelines will ensure a consistency of approach and will allow for key data to be monitored.

The Department of Education and Skills', Tusla Education Support Service and the Department of Children & Youth Affairs' position is that reduced timetables should not be used as a behavioural management technique in the form of a sanction. It is acknowledged that reduced timetables may be helpful in exceptional circumstances as part of a transition or reintegration intervention, based on the needs of individual students. Where a reduced timetable is used it should be applied proportionately, should have signed parental/guardian consent and should last only as long as is necessary to facilitate a return to school on a full-time basis.

School authorities are reminded that the guidelines in place on developing a code of behaviour¹ clearly state that: "*Exclusion of a student for part of the school day, as a sanction, or asking parents to keep a child from school, as a sanction, is a suspension. Any exclusion imposed by the school is a suspension, and should follow the Guidelines relating to suspension*". The procedures in relation to suspension are set out section 10 and 11 of the same document. Schools are required, under section 23(2) of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, to include their procedures for suspension and expulsion in their code of behaviour.

¹ Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools. National Educational Welfare Board (now TUSLA), 2008

Therefore, it is important that these guidelines on reduced timetables should be read in conjunction with relevant guidelines from Tusla Education Support Service including *Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools* (2008) and *Development of the Statement of Strategy for School Attendance* (2015) both of which can be accessed at www.tusla.ie/tess. Other resources include information on supports available from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) on the DES' website: <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/NEPS-Home-Page.html> and from the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) at www.ncse.ie

2 Reduced Timetables

All students who are enrolled in a school should attend for the full day (See Section 3.1), except in exceptional circumstances.

For the purpose of these guidelines, reduced timetables can be any or all of the following:

- a reduced day in school where, by arrangement with the school authorities, a student arrives to school after the usual starting time or leaves before the end of the school day, and/or
- a reduced week where, by arrangement with the school authorities, a student may not attend the full five days each week.

3 Regulations/Guidelines

3.1 Length of School Day / Time in School

The provisions in relation to minimum school hours are set out in the Department's *Time in School Circulars; 0011/1995* (for primary schools) and *M0029/1995* (for post-primary schools).

Primary

For primary schools, a full school day comprises a period of not less than five hours and forty minutes. This includes time for roll call and a recreational break.

Schools are permitted to reduce the school day by one hour for children in infants and first class. The decision to apply this concession rests with the board of management. Such decisions should be dictated by the educational interests of the children.

Post-primary

At post-primary level the minimum number of instruction hours per week is 28.

4 When might a reduced timetable be used?

Where schools apply a reduced timetable, such arrangements should only be put in place in exceptional circumstances, following consultation with, and consent of the parents / guardians and where it is the agreed position that it is in the best interests of the student to have a shorter school day for a time-limited period. The views of the student should also be sought and given due consideration.

Reduced timetables should only ever be considered in very limited and time-bound circumstances; such as, for example, assisting a student to return to a school where they have been experiencing an absence, or due to a medical or mental health-related condition or other exceptional circumstances.

Any such arrangement should be transitional, and designed to assist the student to attend for the full school day into his/her class with his/her peers. In making any such arrangements school authorities should always be mindful of the best interests of the child and of the child's right to a full day in school.

5 Key Requirements for the use of reduced timetables

Where schools are considering placing a student on a reduced timetable, the school:

- a) Must have clear evidence-based reasons for considering a reduced timetable as a relevant and appropriate intervention with the best interests of the child at the core of the decision.
- b) Must have the written consent of the parent/guardian of the student, and must also receive written notification from the parent/guardian if consent is withdrawn.
- c) Must notify Tusla Education Support Service (TESS) no later than the first day for each episode when the student has been placed on a reduced timetable by completing the form attached at the end of this document. It is important to note that this does not automatically initiate an intervention from a TESS educational welfare officer. However the notification system will allow data on the use of reduced timetables to be collected and monitored and intervention to occur where necessary.
- d) Must notify the NCSE (Local SENO) where the student has special educational needs (SEN).
- e) Must formulate and agree a plan of action, agreed with the parents/guardians and students (having regard to medical advice where relevant) for the student's reintegration to a full-time school day. Ideally, the period on which the student is on a reduced timetable, should not exceed six school weeks. A reduced timetable/reduced day must not be carried forward from one academic year to the next.
- f) Must include in the plan of action, the name of a contact person in the school with whom the parents/guardians may communicate, any work plan for the time during which the student will not be in attendance at the school and whether any interventions will be provided while the student is not in attendance at school.
- g) Must provide the parent/guardian with a copy of the agreed plan, signed by parents/guardians and school principal, and retain a copy which must be given to the educational welfare officer or a member of the DES Inspectorate if requested.
- h) Should consider arranging during this time a period of school attendance which increases steadily and incrementally towards full attendance;

- i) Must hold a review with the student and their parents/guardians if a student is still on a reduced timetable as the time limit of the plan approaches.
- j) Must only consider an extension in exceptional circumstances and only with the further written consent of parents/guardians.
- k) Must submit a new notification form to Tusla Education Support Service when the period during which the student has been on a reduced timetable is extended no later than the first day of renewal of the plan.
- l) Must keep a record of all instances of students being placed on reduced timetables and access to this list should be made available to TESS educational welfare officers and the Department of Education and Skills Inspectorate if requested.
- m) Must inform the parent/guardian of their right to withdraw consent at any time
- n) Must inform the parent/ guardian that TESS educational welfare officer can provide assistance and advice if required.

6 Supports available to schools

6.1 Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs.

The Department of Education and Skills has provided significant additional resources such as special education teachers and special needs assistants to schools to support the inclusion of students with SEN. In addition, the DES also provides significant additional supports and funding to schools through the DEIS School Support Programme targeting the inclusion of children at risk of educational disadvantage.

6.2 National Council For Special Education (NCSE)

The NCSE Support Service includes enhancing the quality of learning and teaching in relation to special educational provision.

The NCSE Support Service has responsibility for-

- Providing continual professional development (CPD) and support for teachers in the area of special educational needs (SEN) to enhance the quality of learning and teaching in relation to special education needs (SEN) provision.
- Providing support and expertise to partner schools on issues related to behaviour.
- Supporting the introduction of the new model of resource teaching allocation to schools and to develop capacity to meet the needs of students with SEN.

Schools seeking advice on professional development relating to a specific special education issue in the school may contact the NCSE Support Service. The NCSE may offer telephone advice, a school visit from a member of the team, or an in-service course for the staff.

6.3 The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)

Early intervention and whole school approaches are the most important strategy in supporting students with SEN and managing emotional and behavioural difficulties. In addition to assisting schools to support individual students, NEPS offers a support and development programme to build capacity in schools in relation to evidence-based practice in the promotion of academic, social and emotional competence.

NEPS, in consultation with parents/guardians, teachers and relevant professionals, may support a plan for a gradual reintroduction to school for children who are out of school due to school phobia or separation anxiety or other exceptional circumstances.

6.4 Functions of Tusla Education Support Service (TESS)

Tusla educational welfare officers operate under the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000. TESS is charged with ensuring that every child either attends school regularly or otherwise receives a minimum education.

Educational welfare officers work with parents, young people, schools and other agencies to address barriers to attendance.

The Education (Welfare) Act, 2000 outlines responsibilities of all parties in relation to school attendance including parents, principals, boards of management and TESS Educational Welfare Officers.

A full list of the functions of Tusla can be accessed through the following link:

<http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2000/act/22/section/10/enacted/en/html>

7 Appeals Mechanism

As the use of a reduced timetable is mutually agreed between the school and the parent/guardian, the issue of appeal should therefore not arise. However, schools must advise parents that they can withdraw their consent at any time during the stated period during which the student is on a reduced timetable.

Where parental consent is withdrawn and the school proceeds with a reduced timetable, this is effectively a sanction and, in accordance with Tusla's *Developing A Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools (2008)*, the relevant procedures in relation to a suspension apply.

The provision for appeals for suspensions and exclusions is set out under Section 29 of the Education Act 1998. Information on the appeal procedures under Section 29 of the Education Act, 1998 is set out on the Department of Education and Skills' website <https://www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/Appeal-against-Permanent-Exclusion-Suspension-or-Refusal-to-Enrol/>

TESS educational welfare officers are available to provide parents/guardians with advice and support in relation to their child's attendance at school and making a Section 29 appeal.

8 Dissemination of the Guidelines

Please ensure that a copy of these guidelines is provided to all members of the board of management and education and training board. The guidelines should also be brought to the attention of all principals, teachers (including home/school/community liaison staff) and special needs assistants in your employment, including those on leave of absence. Staff involved in the School Completion Programme and other relevant community supports should also be informed of these guidelines. A copy of these guidelines must be made available to parents/guardians on request and must always be provided to parents/guardians where a reduced timetable is being put in place for their child.

REDUCED TIMETABLE NOTIFICATION FORM

Section 1 Details

Student and Family

Student's Name			
Address:			
Date of Birth:			
Parent's/Guardian's Name		Tel No.	
Student's Class/Year			

Section 2

School Details

School Name			
School Address		Roll No.	
School Email		Tel No.	
Name and Contact Details of the person in the school overseeing this reduced timetable:			

Section 3 Details Relating to the Reduced Timetable

What are the grounds for placing the student on a reduced timetable?			
If the reason is behaviour related, please confirm that the reduced timetable is part of a reintegration initiative	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Have the parents/guardians of the student been involved in the decision-making process?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Has the student been involved in the process?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Have parents/guardians been advised of their right to withdraw consent at any time?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>
Date Reduced Timetable commenced:	
Date Reduced Timetable ends:	
How many hours per day/week will the student attend school while the reduced timetable is in place?	Daily Hours <input type="checkbox"/> Weekly Hours <input type="checkbox"/>
Has a plan been developed to support the student's return to full-time education?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>
Does the student's support plan clearly set out how full reintegration is to be achieved?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>
Has this student been on a reduced timetable previously <u>this</u> school year?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Has this student been on a reduced timetable in <u>previous</u> school years?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Has the student been formally assessed as having special educational needs?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
What is the student's Ethnic Identifier as entered on the POD/PPOD system? (Leave blank if no consent given)	
Has a signed copy of this Notification Form been given to the student's parents/guardians?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>

I _____ (Parent/Guardian) consent to the use of a reduced timetable as outlined above for the child named above

I _____ (Parent/Guardian) consent to the information on this Reduced Timetable Notification Form being submitted to Tusla Education Support Service. I am aware that I can choose to leave the Ethnic Identifier section blank if I so wish.

Signature of Parent/Guardian _____

Signature of Principal: _____

Name of Principal _____ **Date:** _____
(Capitals)

NOTES:

1. Educational welfare officers are not authorised to approve reduced timetables for schools
2. Complete and signed Notification Forms (copied for school records), must be forwarded to EWS by post.
3. Post Notifications To: Rachel Good, Tusla Education Support Services, Tusla, Brunel Building, Heuston South Quarter, Dublin 8.
4. For reasons of data protection, you are requested not to send Notifications of Reduced Timetable Forms by email.
5. A copy of this form when completed should be issued to the student's parents/guardians.
6. For parents//guardians: If you wish to seek advice or assistance or if you are not happy with the proposed use of a reduced timetable for your child, you can contact an educational welfare officer. Contact details for Tusla Education Support Services regional offices are available at www.tusla.ie/tess/get-in-touch/